

THE HAND OF THE UNKNOWN

By ROBERT RUSSELL

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Synopsis of Chapters Already Published

James Alton, a young man brought up in the lowest quarter of New York, but of education and fine instincts, leaves the city after an altercation with his brutal father. Before taking his train he finds a handbag which has been dropped by a young woman sitting near him. Mrs. Grace Gordon, at the moment a telegram was handed to her. Unable to return the bag, Alton boards his train, and during the night the bag is stolen from him, but subsequently recovered. Arrived at his destination, Chanton, a country town, Alton seeks to return the bag to Mrs. Gordon, who happens to live there, but in so doing encounters Frank Black, an important personage. In love with Grace, Black accompanies Jim to her home, where, to the amazement of all, the girl rushes to Alton and throws her arms about his neck, calling him "Jim". It develops that Grace has been insane by news contained in the telegram that her brother and baby have been burned to death in the fire which nearly destroyed Chanton, and seeing Jim, the last person she had noticed before her mind became deranged, she takes him for her brother, who she believes can restore her child. Old Dr. Jordan says that Jim must have been the brother of a distant relative, but humor Grace in her belief that he is her brother. She finds in the big Jim restored to her the chain worn by her baby, which inspires the hope that the baby may not be dead after all. Jim, captivated by the girl, and who has him killed. Grace is not happy with Jim away from her, and she tells her that a new arrangement must be made. Telling Grace that Jim is not really her brother, but was adopted years before she was born, she asks Jim if he has the strength to marry her, so that he can be with her constantly in the search for the baby, and yet treat the marriage as a mere form. Grace says it is no sister's love she bears him.

CHAPTER XXX.

WHAT THE GYPSY KNEW.
IT WAS late in the afternoon when Mrs. Graham, Dr. Jordan, Grace, and Jim met again in the great library of the Gordon house.

"He ought to be here any moment now, Jim," said the old man. Then turning to the girl, "Are you happy, Grace?"

"Happier than at any time since baby went away," Dr. Jordan, she replied quietly, "and sure that he will soon be in my arms."

Then it was very quiet in the room and at last came the gentle ringing of the doorbell.

Mrs. Graham left the library to answer the summons, and in a few moments returned, accompanied by an old man whose long beard matched the spotless surplice he wore.

"Grace, my little child," said the minister softly, going up to the girl.

"Oh, Dr. Rich," she exclaimed, giving him her hands, "I'm happier than I have been in a long time."

"And you, young man," the clergyman went on, turning to Alton, "you should be humbly thankful, sir."

"And shall be to my dying day," was Jim's quiet answer.

Then very quickly and solemnly the old man made these two one while Doctor Jordan and Mrs. Graham watched and prayed.

It was over and Jim and his bride were alone again in the great room.

"It's forever," murmured the girl. "Pray God—forever," responded Jim. A little while they were silent in each other's arms, then there came to Alton the realization that the deeds to be accomplished would remain undone if he were to give way to the desires of his heart to remain quietly here with his wife.

"I must go, Grace," he said, "and see the gypsy in jail. You remember our plan?"

"I'll be ready in a moment, Jim."

"But, Grace, hadn't I better go alone?"

"Jim, you can tell me to stay here, of course," she replied, "but you know, dear, I want to be with you, and I think that it is better if I hear all he says."

And so together they walked, a few moments later, down the street leading from their home, in the direction of the jail. The sheriff was seated on the front steps, and from within came the voice of one of his contented and well-cared-for "charges" disclosing his frame of mind in an old Irish song.

"Good day, sheriff," said Grace brightly. "We want to see the gypsy prisoner."

Honored by her call, but casting a dubious look at Jim, the sheriff rose hastily.

"But, Miss Grace," he began hesitatingly.

"Sheriff, you have known me a long time, haven't you? Ever since I was a little girl. Didn't you know father?"

"Yes, yes, Miss Grace," replied Sheriff Bill, remembering the time years before when his start in business had come with a small pop-corn stand backed by the old banker who was his father-in-law.

"I know him now, and he was purty good to me."

"Then perhaps you'll trust me. We want to ask his prisoner about—about my baby—and I think I can get more out of him than any one else."

There was no resisting her eyes, and Sheriff Bill was human.

"All right—all right, come with me."

So into the giant's cell they were shown, and behind them the sheriff locked the door.

"I've seen your woman," began Jim at once.

"Ungh," replied the man, considerably in awe of a slight young fellow who could deliver as forcible a blow as he recalled having received from Alton the night of the veranda affair.

"You know where baby is," continued Jim.

"No, no, no English."

"Oh, yes, you do understand. Now listen to me. We'll get the sheriff—the big man—to put handcuffs on you and have you take us right where they are keeping baby."

The terror of the man was pitiable to see in a frame so great.

"No understand, no understand. King kill."

"Do you mean that your king would kill you if you took the policeman there?"

The ignorant fellow could not keep the answering "yes" from his eyes.

"And perhaps would hurt your woman and babies?"

Again the man's eyes flashed their answer.

"But if you could get out of here, and go where your woman is, you could take me—us—to the baby?"

"No, no," and the fear was there once more.

"Let me speak to him, Jim," said Grace quietly. Then turning to the gypsy, "Listen. We don't want to hurt you—all we want is to get the baby back—just as you would want to get back one of your own little ones if he should be taken from you. And you would want to do that, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, mees," the emotional nature of the man spoke under the influence of her soft words.

"Well, if we get you out, so that you can go back to them and take care of them, will you lead us where my baby is?"

"Your babe?"

His eyes grew large and had he not been a prisoner in confinement one would have thought that tears were there.

"Yes, and no one could doubt the mother in the word, 'yes, he's my baby.'"

"But me no take!" shaking his head decidedly. "King kill."

"Grace," suddenly cried Jim, "would you go anywhere with me under any disguise and risk anything? Do you love and trust me enough for that?"

"Jim!" The reproach of her voice humbled him. "Why, dear, do you ask me such a question?"

"Then I have a way. Gypsy John, or whatever your name is, when you travel around the country, don't you sometimes join other gypsies?"

But the man did not seem to understand.

"Your wagon alone. Then come another? Get together? Go on together?"

A violent nod showed he comprehended.

"You get free," continued Jim rapidly. "Wait where your woman is now. We, she and I, come along in gypsy wagon, just like yours. Then we all go. You lead straight to where baby is. King there, is he?"

Another nod, hesitatingly.

"You say to king that you have delivered—given message. Who are we? You don't know. We find baby there. Run away with him. You no help, understand?"

The giant had followed the account of the rescue with excitement. He saw freedom from the prison, and what treachery to those two young people who seemed able to give it to him he planned, perhaps came as an afterthought.

"It was enough for him that immediate sight of the sunlight he loved would be him. Sufficient unto the day was the essence of his creed."

"Yes, yes, I do," he whispered at last.

"And you are not afraid of my plan, Grace?" Jim whispered to the girl.

"Do I think more of my safety than you do of it, Jim? We'll be together, won't we?"

"Gypsy John, you see us tomorrow. We come back and get you. Then we start. But you say no word, tell no one."

"No tell, no tell. You come."

"Yes, we'll come. Good-by."

They knocked on the door of the cell, and the sheriff, wondering what the big prisoner could have told them, came immediately.

"Find out anything?" he asked.

"A little," replied Jim.

"Good-by, sheriff, and thank you," said the girl as Jim and she started down the path toward the street.

"You see, Grace," explained Jim, "we can do in this way what the law could never do. Strange as it may seem, these gypsy tribes have the greatest fear of their leader. It sounds like the middle ages, but I know that even in the places about Manhattan Island where it is not yet built up, and where the gypsies camp, the most romantic allegiance is shown. It may be a plan which only two young lovers would undertake, but I think I can make it safe."

He would go to jail for a great many years, Jim, said the girl, "before he would lead the officers to their hiding place."

"Yes, dear, but he'll lead us."

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been taken, seemed resolved to believe that nothing but good would come of it. Grace and her aunt had entered the library, where the girl seated herself at the piano, when Jim went quietly to the telephone.

"Is this Dr. Jordan?" he said after his ring had been answered. "Yes? Then will you come right up and stop on the porch. I want to see you before you go into the house."

Jim then went into the peaceful library and the moments which passed before he heard a step on the veranda were impatient but happy ones for him.

"I'll see who it is," he said rising.

He returned in a moment. "It's Dr. Jordan," he reported. "He wants to talk to me about a business matter. I'll be right out there on the porch if you want me, Grace. Keep on with your playing. I like to hear it."

"Now, doctor," he began, when they were seated in the gathering darkness, "it is my turn to propose starting plans. And may mine prove as wise as yours."

Then he recounted the afternoon's visit to the gypsy, and the scheme he had formed for finding Grace's child.

"Preposterous!" cried the old man. "The gypsy would only sneak away from you if he did nothing worse. I'm surprised, Jim."

"But you have not heard everything yet, doctor. Listen."

A quarter of an hour Jim talked, and it was an appalling hour Jim sat by his side till he had finished.

"And you dare, Jim?" he said then. "You dared trust me, doctor."

"Yes, but I was relying on—"

"On love."

"And don't you see, doctor, so am I."

"You see," Jim continued, playing his last card, "even if we are unsuccessful in finding the child, the change in her manner of living, the new scenes, and all that, would be the best sort of treatment for Grace's mind; now wouldn't it?"

"You've hit it, my boy; you're right."

"And those people out there on that lonely farm of whom you told me—are they absolutely trustworthy?"

"For two generations they have worked the place for Grace's family. They'd almost die—all of them—for her."

"And you'll give me a note to them now, and go out there every few days?"

"It's a long, hard trip, Jim, but I can manage it."

"And now," said Jim, "as to arranging for me to get away tonight. I can't leave Grace, you know."

"But you've got to, Jim. You can't take her."

"No, but she can leave me."

"Likely, isn't it, boy?"

"Doctor," and Jim smiled at the way in which he was turning the tables on the old man, "doctor, one of your patients is extremely ill tonight—one who lives a long way off—and wants Grace by her."

"By hooker, Jim, you're a wonder—and of course, old Jane, Grace's nurse, is dangerously ill. How long will you want me to keep her away?"

"As long as you can—all night, to make it safe. It wouldn't do to have her come back and find me not here."

"All right, Jim, I can do it," said the old man, as they entered the house. "I wonder if you know what chances you are taking?"

"The music from the library had continued all through their talk, but now it ceased and an eager girl left her place to come to Jim's side.

"You're getting good to come so often, Dr. Jordan," she said. "But I suppose Jim wanted to tell you about our plan."

"Yes, Grace, and he has. But I have something else to tell you. I am the bearer of unpleasant news, coming on this of all nights. I want to take you away with me, Grace."

"Doctor Jordan?" she asked.

"Grace, old Jane is perhaps dying, and has called for you. She wants you by her—and remember the years of her life she gave to you, when you had no mother—"

"Oh, Jane," cried the girl. "I didn't know. Why didn't some one tell me?"

"We all thought you had worried enough," said Mrs. Graham. "I've known of her illness, but how bewildered and wondering what new development was coming. 'I didn't know she was so bad.'"

"Oh, doctor, I'll go at once with you!" Then to Jim: "You won't mind, dear. We have all the rest of our lives together, you know."

"Yes, Grace, go on—you must."

And so the old doctor and the girl, seated in his comfortable buggy, started on their long drive to the home of the music.

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Jane Biglow. Good had already come from Alton's plan, for the deathbed of a faithful old woman was to be made happy by the presence of the child on whom she had bestowed a mother's love.